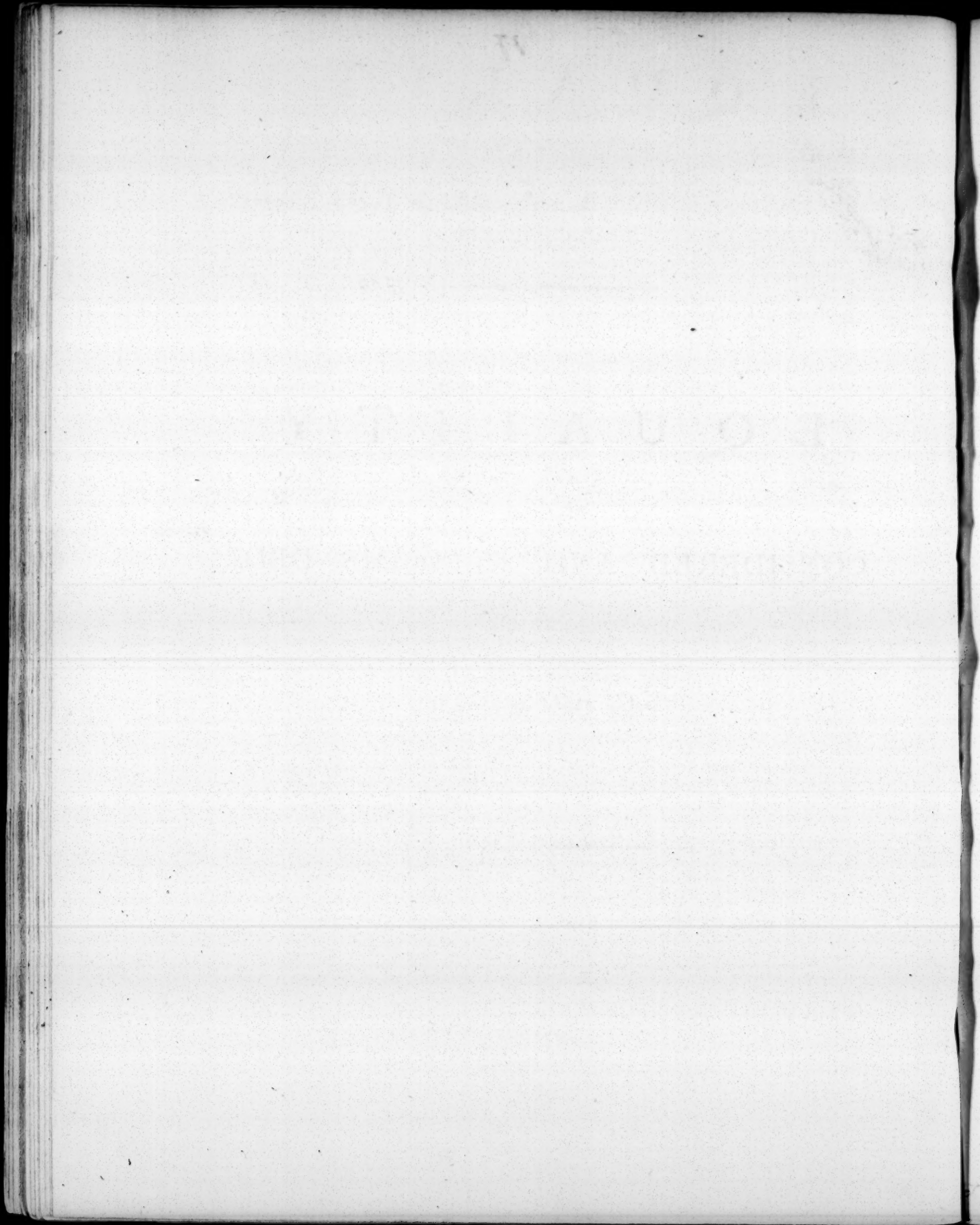

EQUALITY

CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED.

[Price One Shilling.]



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E Q U A L I T Y

CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED,

I N A

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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER-SQUARE,

April the 6th, 1794.

By JAMES SCOTT, D.D.

LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

Rector of Symondsbourne

In the Diocese of Durham and County of Northumberland

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TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

in the House of Representatives
of the United States

REPORT
OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF THE
LAND OFFICE

EQUALITY

CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED.

*“ I mean not that other Men be eased, and you burdened; but
“ by an Equality, that now at this Time your Abundance may be
“ a Supply for their Want.” 2 Cor. viii. 13, 14.*

IF we take an imaginary survey of mankind in a state of Nature, prior to the institution of Civil Society, we shall find that they were all equal: the world was before them in common, a large and universal patrimony; they were all partakers of the same common nature; were created with the same wants, appetites, and passions; and enjoyed every one an equal right to satisfy them as they were able. In such a state, there could be no distinction of rich and poor, noble and base, lord and vassal; which are all relative terms, implying, on one hand, indigence, meanness, and subjection; and, on the other, affluence, honour, and dominion. How long mankind continued in such a state of equality, enjoying
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the free and promiscuous use of the bounties of the creation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine: thus far, however, may be affirmed with safety, that, from the texture and composition of the human frame, it is inconsistent to suppose that such an equality of condition could continue for any length of Time. There is so much fear and suspicion in our nature; so many restless, craving, and insatiable appetites, tempered together with so much pride and envy; that, however calm and even the tenor of human life might be at the beginning, the stream would not fail in a while to be swelled and ruffled by these turbulent passions; and, like a river overcharged with rain, would soon break down the banks, and make encroachments. After mankind had begun to multiply into considerable numbers, and had cultivated and improved the method of living, Avarice, that furious and insatiable passion, would begin to hoard up whatever was within its grasp; several persons would want and desire the same thing, which could not possibly content them all together, being capable of serving no more than one at the same time; each would endeavour to seize and secure it for himself; and hence quarrels and hostilities must necessarily arise. Now, it was to prevent this strife and clashing, and to secure to every one the quiet possession of his own particular property, that Society was at first instituted, and afterwards strengthened and supported by the invention of laws and government.

It is one of the wildest and most fantastic of all chimæras to suppose that men, fashioned and disposed as we are by the Almighty, could ever live peaceably together for any length of time in a state of equality, and have all things in common; for, it is plain that, unless they had all things in common, such a state of equality could not possibly subsist. Those
who

who have planned such a visionary project have always taken for granted the very thing that stood in the greatest need of proof, and without which they built only castles in the air without any foundation, or amused themselves like children with blowing up gaudy bubbles, which the least breath of air would disperse in a moment. If indeed all men were perfectly just and honest, a supposition which is the key-stone that supports all their reasoning, such a communion of goods might be natural enough, and convenient: but, where shall we find this primitive innocence and simplicity, this more than Saturnian justice and perfection of virtue? We must look for it in Atalantis*, Utopia†, the Realm of the Sun‡, or any where in short except in this corrupt and degenerate world of ours, where it would be downright idiotism to expect it. No! We are here distracted with a variety of wild and irregular passions, which, unless they are held with the bit and bridle, will be always hurrying us over the bounds of justice and honesty. In such a state as this, and to persons disposed thus waywardly, a community of goods would be attended with a thousand inconveniences, a thousand mischiefs. Let us put the case as favourably as possible; and, flying away from this iron age of penury and violence, transport ourselves back to the favourite æra of poets and moralists, to the happy golden days of peace and plenty. Let us suppose that the hand of all-bountiful Nature was to pour her blessings so lavishly upon us, that they were more than sufficient to supply all our wants and necessities; nay, since we have once begun, let us suppose too that her bounty was as miraculously circumstanced, to prevent all rapacious and greedy hoarding, as the manna of the Israelites, of which we read, that whosoever

* Plato.

† Sir T. Moore.

‡ Campanella.

gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack : yet even then,—what would be the consequence ? We should sink into a state of supineness and indolence ; we should be more despicable to the impartial eye of Reason than the little, busy, provident, communities of ants and bees ; there would be no society nor kind intercourse of benefits where we could none of us stand in need of another's assistance ; all the liberal arts and sciences, which at present embellish and beatify* human life, would be unknown and unthought of ; we should live, or rather vegetate, in dull and inglorious solitude, and subsist, like worthless drones, on the common plunder of the creation. What a flat unvarying prospect is this ! and how intolerable would be such a state of inactivity and indifference ! Yet, bad as it appears, it is far preferable to what would really ensue from a communion of goods in our present situation and circumstances. We see that Nature is impaired with age, and almost worn out with hard and incessant labours : she is no longer a kind and indulgent parent, that prevents the wishes of her numerous children ; but, like a cruel and obdurate stepmother, will part with nothing till compelled to it by necessity. Now, in this situation, were men to labour in common, and be supported from the same promiscuous heap, the feuds and animosities that would arise are innumerable and endless. What equality could there be between the profits and expences of different persons ? One man would be indolent, and another luxurious ; yet both are to be maintained from the same common stock, as well as the industrious and frugal. But it would be endless to enumerate all the inconveniences that would attend such a disposition of the goods of Nature ; and we can never sufficiently adore the

* Vitam quæ faciunt beatiorem.

MARTIAL.

wisdom

wisdom and providence of God, who has so contrived it, that, though all men are by Nature equal, there should be a regular subordination in the world, and that we should all stand in need of each other's assistance. What an orderly and beautiful gradation, what a continued chain and series of dependences, what frequent opportunities for a reciprocation of kindness and benevolence, spring naturally from this distribution and management of affairs!

I have just asserted that all men are by nature equal: by which I cannot be understood to mean that all men are born with the same sagacity of mind or vigour of constitution, nor that they are all born with equal rights; for, that would be a palpable absurdity, as they are born with no rights at all. It is a mortifying, but an undeniable truth, that, of all God's creatures, Man at his birth is the most indigent and impotent: he depends for support and existence upon parental affection: this is his only claim, his only right; and, though Providence by a powerful instinct has contrived that this right should be generally allowed, yet there are instances, in civilized as well as savage nations, that controvert it. When it is affirmed, therefore, that all men are by nature equal, it can mean only that we are all children of the same common father; all partakers of the same common nature; all endowed with the same rational and immortal principle; all introduced without our consent into the same world—a world full of irregularity, full of inequality, in which we are placed, as in a state of trial and probation, to fill that particular rank which Providence has thought fit to assign us. If we consider the vast disparity there is in the tempers, dispositions, capacities, endowments; and passions, of different men, it is plain that an inequality of rank must have been a part of the plan of the divine

vine

vine architect, or mankind would certainly have been framed and fashioned differently. If we consider too the nature and properties of this earth which we inhabit, it is evident, without retroverting to the primæval curse, that the bulk of mankind can only be supported by labour and industry: “Thorns and thistles does it bring forth, and in the sweat of their face must they eat the bread thereof.” It is clear, therefore, that, in the order of Providence, the distinctions of high and low, rich and poor, were determined; and that the latter should bear, in point of numbers, a vast disproportion to the former. Yet still they are all children of the same father; and it were impious to suppose that he would leave the largest part of his family unprotected, and unprovided for, or that he would appoint no means to counterpoise that apparent inequality which he has thought proper to constitute. This is not a place to enter into an argument, and prove, what is perfectly clear and demonstrable, that the enjoyments of the poor are at least as certain and satisfactory as those of the rich. I shall, therefore, insist a little upon the methods which God makes use of to render this inequality of rank less perceptible and injurious; and these are two: the one, of a nature accidental and variable, the other, of eternal and immutable obligation.

And, first, the *artificial* wants of the rich are a constant supply to the *real* wants of the poor: their pursuits, amusements, and pleasures; the joys of the chase, and the refinements and elegances of the table; their paintings and statues; their stately palaces and costly furniture; their splendid equipages and gorgeous apparel; in short, every thing that is ornamental rather than useful, and calculated not to obviate real wants, but to dazzle and bewitch the imagination;—all
this

this state and magnificence, this pomp and pageantry, are inexhaustible sources from which the poor are maintained—they give support to industry, and reward to genius. An unequal distribution of wealth is the necessary consequence of an advancement in arts and commerce; and you must either cut the trees down to the ground, or suffer the fruits to be enjoyed. A neighbouring country is now making the experiment, and has laid the axe of destruction to the root of every thing, that polished nations have been accustomed to cultivate and admire. But, are the poor happier, because all distinctions are levelled? Are they richer, because property is made a crime, and all circulation is stopt between the trunk and the branches? Look at the miserable condition of France, and you will tell me, No! It is in the order of God's Providence that the poor should derive their support from the rich; and, if you cut off the rich, the poor must necessarily wither and decay. The poor can no more live without the rich, than the rich without the poor; they are mutually dependent upon, and mutually useful to, each other: a kind of equality takes place between them; and, as the Apostle recommends in my text, the abundance of the one is a supply for the wants of the other.

I would not be mistaken here as if I was an advocate for luxury, in the sense in which it is often understood: when it is displayed in ostentation, vanity, and insolence; when it induces habits of profuseness and debauchery; when it consumes a man's substance, and reduces him to a state of criminal poverty; above all, when, to support his extravagance, he defrauds his creditors, ruins his family, or, allured by the rewards of compliance, endeavours to earn the wages of prostitution—in all these cases luxury is the bane of the individual,

dual, and, if I may use so gross an expression, the very CAN-
cer of the State. But, when it is not abused in any of those
points which I have just enumerated, it is a mark of national
health and prosperity ; it is an innocent consequence of that
influx of wealth, which an extension of commerce and the li-
beral arts is sure to produce ; it resembles one of the grand
arteries of the body, by which the circulation is maintained,
and the vital blood diffused to the smallest and remotest
vessels.

It is plain then that, from this unequal distribution of
riches, labour, and industry, and ingenuity, which in a state of
equality would languish and stagnate, are in some measure
maintained and supported : but, as these resources are acci-
dental and variable, there is another to which the poor have
an undoubted right ; a right that is antecedent to all human
laws, immutable and eternal ; a right that is founded on the
great charter of Nature, and has been confirmed from Hea-
ven by the express injunction of God himself.

Come unto me, ye that travel, and are heavy laden with
riches, and hear the great law of charity as it is laid down in
the Gospel. God, who is the common father of the universe,
has not forgot that he has other children besides you, who
look up to him for support and nourishment. If, for weighty
and substantial reasons, best known to his unerring wisdom,
he has not treated them so favourably as he has done you, yet
think not they are wholly forsaken of God, and abandoned.
He has made you, as it were, his first-born, and given you a
portion as elder sons ; yet still the poor are his children, and
your brethren ; and your Heavenly Father has given you *his*
substance to feed and support them. He speaks to you as St.
Paul,

Paul, his interpreter and apostle, did to the first Christians ; part of your goods ye shall give to your brethren ; I do not require you to give them all, or the greater part, of your possessions, nor that ye impoverish yourselves to enrich them ; I mean not, says my text, that other men be eased, and you burdened ; but you shall distribute your goods in such a manner, that there may be a kind of equality between you and them.

This is the great law of charity—this is the only equality that, in a state of civilized society, can possibly subsist : the poor, who have nothing, will find a resource in the bounty of the rich ; having nothing, they will yet possess all things : and the rich, though possessing all things, will have nothing superfluous ; for, they will regard their own abundance as a supply for the want of others.

If ever there was a crisis in human affairs when the poor should learn to be content, and the rich to condescend to men of low estate, it is the present. The visionary system of equality, which is so enchanting to the lower class of mankind, has been tried in France, and has rendered the condition of the poor unspeakably wretched. All their resources, since the proscription and murder of the rich, are cut off—there is no reward for labour, no encouragement for ingenuity ; the hireling is robbed of his wages, the mechanick and manufacturer of their goods, the crops of the farmer are wrested from him by violence, and sold at an arbitrary price ; there is no repose, no security even of life ; they are harrassed with constant dread and terror ; and those, who are not massacred upon false and frivolous pretences, are torn away from their wives and children, and driven like sheep to the slaughter of
C battle,

battle, where they are butchered by thousands to promote the views of a few bloody and unfeeling tyrants. If we add to all this, that they are half famished and half naked, we shall have a true picture of the poor in France. How different from that which this happy island exhibits ! Here labour and industry are sure of their reward ; here every encouragement is given to ingenuity, the first situations in Church and State being open to the poor as well as the rich : here is no oppression, no injustice, but a perfect security of property, and an equality of right ; the peer and the peasant are under the controul and protection of the same laws, which in all essential points make no distinction between them : here the gains of the mechanick, the wages of the labourer, and the harvest of the husbandman, are protected from violence and depredation—in short, every poor man is sure, in this happy country, to eat the labour of his hands in peace and safety. O ! that they were wise, that they understood this ! that they would consider these inestimable blessings ; blessings derived from our excellent Constitution, which seems to second as it were the intentions of Providence, by taking under its protection that part of his numerous family which, in other countries, is but too much neglected and oppressed !

I have no occasion to insist largely on the duty of the rich to the poor, as the Apostle has very happily comprized the whole in two words, “ be pitiful, be courteous *.” Shew a tender sense of the miseries of your fellow-creatures, and a readiness to relieve them ; but do this with gentleness and condescension. Be courteous : nothing costs a great man so little as courtesy, and nothing turns to so good an account.

* Ευσπλαγχοι, φιλοφρονες, 1 Pet. iii. 8.

To conclude ; let us all, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, pray for the peace of Jerusalem : may they prosper that love thee : peace be within thy walls, and plentifulness within thy palaces : for my brethren and companions sake I will wish thee prosperity : yea, because of the House of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good !



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